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OXC-0596

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31 May 1960

DOCUMENT NO. 104

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CLASS. (EXEMPT) TO: NS 2012

REASON: 2012

AUTH: 5/15/82

DATE: 5/15/82 REVIEWER:

25X1

MEMORANDUM FOR : Deputy Director (Plans)

SUBJECT : Status of Project OXCART in Light of Press Reaction to U-2 Incident

1. Up to the time of the Hanson Baldwin article appearing in the 29 May issue of the Sunday New York Times, in which specific reference was made to a U-3 successor to the U-2, press reaction to the U-2 incident, in terms of its effect on the intelligence collection capability of the United States, had been divided into roughly two categories. These were:

a. Newspapers and periodicals who regarded the U-2 incident as marking "the end of the era of manned reconnaissance, and the start of the era of satellite reconnaissance." The launching of the first successful MIDAS satellite, occurring as it did in the midst of the whole U-2 business, appeared to further signify such a demarkation. In effect, these people were writing off manned reconnaissance as too risky in the light of the Soviet attitude of intransigence over the U-2 border violation.

b. Commentators and writers who saw in the demise of the U-2 the end of an extremely useful project well before the time when a reliable satellite reconnaissance capability would be in being. Emphasis shifted rapidly from talk about our "missile gap" to talk about what was described as an "intelligence gap." This group estimated that it would be near the end of 1962 before satellite reconnaissance would be in a position to supply even part of the wealth of detail possible in the U-2. Both groups, however, appeared willing to concede that satellite reconnaissance offered less potential cause for international complaints, since national sovereignty concepts are ill-defined at the altitudes required by orbiting vehicles.

2. The position taken by the first group appears to offer greater possibilities for OXCART cover than the second. If the defense establishment acts

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in such a manner that emphasis is placed on speeding up development of satellite reconnaissance vehicles, and talk about a higher performance, manned reconnaissance aircraft is officially dropped, development of OXCART could proceed largely in the wings rather than on center stage.

3. However, should there be Congressional interest expressed in actual development of what Hanson Baldwin refers to as "the U-3," it appears quite likely that someone might leak details of the OXCART project to such an extent as to make its further development difficult, if not impossible. Accordingly, I feel that we should seize the initiative before lengthy debate occurs on "the U-3" and go through an overt cancellation of OXCART within the circle of witting individuals in CIA and Defense, in a manner similar to the tactic employed some years ago when the U-2 was "cancelled." Correspondence would be circulated between the Agency and Defense, and between the Agency and Lockheed, cancelling the OXCART contract and giving as the reason the fact that the untimely compromise of the U-2 project and resultant unfavorable political impact had made further development of a manned reconnaissance vehicle inappropriate. It could further be stated that it was our intent to apply funds previously earmarked for OXCART to satellite reconnaissance programs under the aegis of either NASA or Defense. Such correspondence could be exchanged minus some of our ordinary hold down procedures, in such a manner as to permit its informal dissemination among individuals on the edge of the OXCART-cleared circle; i.e., aides and secretaries of Pentagon officials themselves cleared for OXCART.

4. The name of OXCART would be dropped under this plan, and a new and highly restricted cryptonym would be adopted. The name which is Air Force jargon for OXCART, would similarly be cancelled. Continuing work on the new OXCART would have to proceed under stricter security ground rules than ever, and knowledge of its continuation would have to be confined to an extremely small group in Defense and CIA, even if this meant, in the case of the Agency, creating a "cell" within DPB or another component. 25X1

5. I fear that if some such step is not undertaken without delay, and if the Defense Department does not posture itself in such a manner as to support the idea that manned reconnaissance is a thing of the past, we are quite apt to find ourselves standing in the midst of a wholly exposed Project OXCART. Your comments and guidance are earnestly invited.

SIGNED

JAMES A. CUNNINGHAM, JR.
Chief, Administrative Branch
DPB-DD/P

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